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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION ON MIDDLE EAST

Summary

-- Lead story in all papers today, August 10, highlights Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas's speech before a Legislative Council session held in Gaza, during which he announced that elections for the Palestinian Legislative Council will take place next January and urged Palestinians to facilitate Israel's withdrawal from Gaza.

Editorial Commentary

-- "Iran takes advantage of the appropriate moment in history"

Daily columnist Bader Wardam writes on the op-ed page of center-left, influential Arabic daily Al-Dustour (09/10): "Iran's decision to go back to working on its nuclear program for military purposes is a well calculated and wise decision on all levels, and it comes at the best time possible for the Iranian leadership. If there is ever a lesson to be learned from the American invasion of Iraq, it is that this invasion did not take place because Iraq had nuclear weapons, as the U.S. leadership lied about to the world, but because, very simply, Iraq did not have these weapons. Had the nuclear weapons been active, effective, and usable, the Americans would not have dared to invade Iraq. The same truth applies to North Korea. America's demands of the Koreans to abandon their nuclear program are soft-spoken and do not include military threats. This is because no one in the United States wants to bear the consequences of a military attack against a nuclear-equipped country that has no reservations about using those weapons in self-defense. Iran's development of nuclear weapons, no matter how simple they would be, is the major guarantee and protection against expected American and Israeli strikes. Iran seems to be better placed politically now to enable it to impose its conditions and options even on the United States. There is economic prosperity in Iran due to the rise of the world oil prices and the Americans and the Europeans know that the revenue from this prosperity is going to go Iran's military machine.. The most important element, however, of Iran's political and economic influence lies in Iraq. The equation in post-occupation Iraq indicates very clearly to the neo-conservatives' stupid policy, political shortsightedness and ideological blindness that have contributed to placing the decision-making process in Iraq under the Iranian influence.. The Americans also know that the Shiites' peacefulness in Iraq remains subject to Iran's signals. And since the American forces are incapable of imposing sovereignty over the Sunni Triangle, they would have a hellish time should Iran, for any reason - one of which could be attempts to abort the Iranian nuclear program - open the doors wide to Jihad against the American forces in Iraq. Iran holds in its hand all the important cards at this stage.. Thus, the Iranian leadership's venture to complete its nuclear program seems to be well calculated since the United States has gotten itself stuck in the Iraqi quagmire and has no helping hand except that of the Iran's influence."

-- "An extremist and spiteful racist"

Daily columnist Jamil Nimri writes in independent Arabic daily Al-Ghad (08/10): "Here we have a terrorist crime that reflects insane racist and religious hatred, which allows us to talk about the culture and environment that nurtures hatred and that produce such people [Referring to the weekend incident of the Israeli soldier that shot at a bus full of Arabs in Shafa Amr, killing four]. It is also an occasion to reflect on our situation: how can we explain a similar act by one of us against Jews? How can we differentiate between these actions that are perpetrated by crazy racist maniacs and the killing of

any number of Jewish civilians in a bus or restaurant, operations claimed officially and with pride by Palestinian factions? The situation is different: they are occupiers and we are under occupation! Is that sufficient to justify the similarity of the methods used? Israel, since its creation, has been responsible for the killing, destruction, and expulsion of the Palestinian people. But Israelis calculate their positions well, and every illegal act is subject to legal questioning, actual or cosmetic. Public standards of legality and legitimacy are ever-present in their calculus, in assessing every act and deciding whether to adopt it, evade it, or even condemn it. We, by contrast, only orate to ourselves. Moreover, leaving Israel aside, what about bombings of civilian crowds in other parts of the world? How can their perpetrators be culturally and morally different from that spiteful racist Zionist? Perhaps one of the greatest tragedies of a cause that is most just, is that resistance is marred by a type of operations that is identical to the wave of terror that the world has lived for some time now." HALE